PREVENTION: SEXUAL OFFENDERS' PERSPECTIVES

An Exploration of Help Seeking Behaviour in Convicted Male Sexual Offenders

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Awareness of sexual abuse and those who abuse is ever growing and there is a growing acceptance and awareness of the need for a broader public health approach to prevent sexual abuse. Currently, there is no preventative intervention in the UK that is capable of detecting, supporting and treating people who fear they may sexually offend against children. However, within the general population it is estimated that approximately 5% of men have a sexual interest in children (Seto, 2008), with recent figures indicating that at least 50,000 people (primarily men) in the UK are viewing child sexual abuse imagery online (Bristow, 2014). Given that the majority of sexual crime remains underreported, prevention initiatives face significant challenges and much remains unknown about the individuals who have not yet committed sexual abuse.

The aim of this research is to explore help seeking behaviour prior to offending in convicted sexual offenders. Specifically, the research will explore convicted sex offenders past experiences prior to prison by determining what they would have wanted in terms of help, what they needed and how (if applicable) they tried to access help; the outcomes of seeking help; the benefits (if any) of accessing help or not and; offenders thoughts on a proposed prevention idea, including what should be done in terms of advertising and delivering the project and identifying what would have worked for them in the community. The research will also explore the need for a community-based prevention project. This study conducted semi-structured interviews with convicted adult male sexual offenders currently serving a prison sentence at a UK prison establishment; HMP Whatton. HMP Whatton is one of the largest sex offender treatment prisons in Europe, housing approximately 850 convicted male sexual offenders. Interviews are conducted with (a) first time offenders who have committed a sexual crime and (b) repeat sex offenders. The interviews explore their experiences in the time leading up to their offending, whether they wanted help with their offending and if so, what they wanted in terms of help. The interviews will also explore offenders’ thoughts on a proposed prevention idea, and identifying what may have worked for them in the community.

Through talking to individuals who could have utilised such a service before they were
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convicted, the results will help identify a need for a UK prevention project and develop a viable strategy in terms of what could work for a community based prevention plan. Results will also provide useful outcome data to inform management professionals of how to effectively intervene before abuse and harm occur.

**Learning Goals and Objectives:**
- To identify a need for a UK prevention project.
- To understand the experiences of convicted male sexual offenders in the time leading up to their offending – with a focus on help-seeking behaviour.
- To provide data on first-hand experience of help-seeking behaviour by individuals concerned about sexually offending in the community and the outcomes of this.
- To gain a service user perspective on a proposed UK prevention project.
- To explore the benefits and pitfalls to seeking and/or accessing help and to not seeking/accessing help.

Understanding the Service User Voice: Sex Offenders Reflections on Themselves, Their Offences, Treatment and Reintegration

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During the provision of social services, emphasis is increasingly placed on user experience and client satisfaction. In the areas of treatment, management, and supervision of individuals convicted of sexual offenses, however, the service user’s voice is often entirely absent. This presentation will examine qualitative data from in depth interviews with men convicted of sexual offenses in the UK (n = 19) and the US (n = 75). We explore the men’s identities, as well as their perspectives about themselves, their offenses, their treatment, and their re-entry into the community. The men’s voices will then be compared and contrasted with that of an international sample of the public, practitioners, and policy makers. Areas of overlap and knowledge gaps will be identified and we will discuss how these disconnects can be resolved in policy and practice.

**Learning Goals and Objectives:**
- Understanding what is meant by the “service user” voice in a sex offender context.
- How sex offenders view their voice in the criminal justice and treatment processes.
- How the sex offender “service user” voice impacts public and professional responses to them and their reintegration.